

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
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AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 3700

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, NU
SUBJECT: CHURCH STATEMENTS : UPDATE

REF: A) MANAGUA 3451 B) MANAGUA 3599 C) MANAGUA 3644
D) NUDELL/ZAMORA MEMCON DATED 1 AUGUST 78 E) NUDELL/ZAMORA/
TABLADA MEMCON DATED 8 AUGUST 78

SUMMARY: WITHIN A TWO-WEEK PERIOD BEGINNING 24 JULY, THE
CHURCH, LED BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF MANAUGA, HAS PUBLICLY
CALLED FOR AN END TO THE VIOLENCE RAGING IN NICARAGUA. ON
THREE SEPARATE OCCASIONS, THE ARCHBISHOP HAS MADE STATEMENTS
STRONGLY SUGGESTIVE OF A MORE-ACTIVE CHURCH ROLE IN SEEKING
SOLUTIONS TO NICARAGUA'S PROBLEMS. THE RESPONSE TO THE
CHURCH MESSAGES HAS BEEN GREAT AND OVERWHELMINGLY FAVORABLE,
BOTH ON THE PART OF THE GON AND THE OPPOSITION. END
SUMMARY.

1. ON 24 JULY, THE ARCHBISHOP, IN A TELEVISION INTER-
VIEW, MADE A STRONG APPEAL FOR NON-VIOLENT RESOLUTION OF
NICARAGUA'S CURRENT WAVE OF VIOLENCE. DESPITE THE
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IMPORTANCE OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S REMARKS, THERE WAS NO
LOCAL MEDIA COMMENT (REFTEL A). HOWEVER, THESE REMARKS
DID SET THE STAGE FOR THE FOLLOWING EVENTS.

2. ON 2 AUGUST, THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE (COMPOSED OF THE
ARCHBISHOPS AND ALL THE BISHOPS) ISSUED A PASTORAL LETTER--
(PUBLISHED 3 AUG.) THEIR FIRST SINCE THEIR NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE.

IN THIS LETTER, THE CHURCH STRONGLY CONDEMNED THE GON AND CALLED FOR "A NEW SOCIO-POLITICAL ORDER" WHICH WOULD IMPROVE THE LOT OF NICARAGUA'S PEOPLE. IN THIS LETTER, THE CHURCH APPEARED TO ALIGN ITSELF WITH THE OPPOSITION AND, INDEED, INDICATIONS WERE THAT THE ARCHBISHOP HAD BEEN MEETING WITH OPPOSITION LEADERS TO PROMOTE THE FORMULATION OF SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR REFORM(REFTEL B). AT THE SAME TIME, ONE MIDDLE-LEVEL PLN MEMBER INDICATED A WILLINGNESS TO HAVE THE ARCHBISHOP MEDIATE "EXCHANGES" BETWEEN PLN AND OPPOSITION (REF D).

3. THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE ARCHBISHOP AND HIS SACERDOTAL COUNCIL (I.E., THE ARCHBISHOP'S COUNCIL OF ADVISERS COMPOSED OF MIDDLE-LEVEL CHURCH OFFICIALS) ISSUED A MESSAGE (PUBLISHED 4 AUG.) WHICH WAS EVEN STRONGER THAN THE PASTORAL LETTER. IN PERHAPS THE STRONGEST PUBLIC STATEMENT EVER MADE BY THE NICARAGUAN CHURCH ON A POLITICAL MATTER, THE ARCHBISHOP SEEMED TO HAVE INDICATED THAT THE CHURCH WOULD BECOME MORE ACTIVE IN ITS OPPOSITION TO THE INCUMBENT GON. AS REPORTED REFTEL C, INITIAL REACTION TO THIS STATEMENT WAS RAPID AND OVERWHELMINGLY FAVORABLE. AS OF 9 AUGUST, THE FOLLOWING OPPOSITION GROUPS HAVE PUBLICLY SUPPORTED THE SACERDOTAL COUNCIL'S MESSAGE: LA PRENSA, INDE, THE AND, THE PCN (AUTENTICOS), THE FAO, THE MDN, AND CADIN (CHAMBER OF INDUSTRY). THUS, EVERY MAJOR POLITICAL OPPOSITION GROUP HAS SUPPORTED THE CHURCH--ALTHOUGH EMB UNDERSTANDS THAT SOME FACTIONS WITHIN FAO OPPOSED SUPPORT FOR CHURCH. CONFIDENTIAL

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4. THE GON RESPONSE TO THE CHURCH MESSAGES HAS BEEN LOW-KEYED AND HAS ATTEMPTED TO USE THE MESSAGES FOR MAXIMUM POLITICAL GAIN, LUIS PALLAIS, PLN SPOESMAN, HAS STATED THAT HE VIEWED THE CHURCH STATEMENTS AS THE BEGINNING OF A DIALOG. HOWEVER, OFFICIAL PLN PUBLIC STATEMENTS SUGGEST THAT THE CHURCH IS NO LONGER PERCEIVED AS BEING NEUTRAL AND A POSSIBLE MEDIATOR IN THE CONFLICT.

5. COMMENT: THESE STATEMENTS BY THE CHURCH REFLECT A GROWING CONCERN ON THE PART OF THE RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITION OVER THE DIRECTION OF EVENTS. THE OPPOSITION MAY BE MOVING TOWARD AN INTERNAL ISOLATION OF ITS MORE RADICAL COMPONENTS AND THE EMERGENCE OF A COMMITMENT TO MODERATE, PEACEFUL AND MORE GRADUAL REFORM OF THE SYSTEM. THE CHURCH IS CLEARLY AMONG THOSE FALLING WITHIN THE MORE MODERATE GROUP. IT APPEARS THE OPPOSITION CONTINUES TO DEMAND UNILATERAL CONCESSIONS FROM SOMOZA AND THE CHURCH STATEMENTS ARE INTERPRETED BY THEM IN THIS LIGHT. SOLAUN

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